Realities of Working with the Media

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How to Handle the Media Monster without Being Mauled

The Golden Triangle

- You
- The Public
- Media

The Media

- Who are they?
- How do they operate?

The Media

- Communications Act of 1934
- …stations must operate in the “public interest, convenience and necessity.”

The Media

- The 1980’s resulted in hostile takeovers and leveraged buyouts
The History

• ABC fell first…bought out by CapCities; eventually bought by Disney who now owns it

• NBC was owned by RCA, which was bought by General Electric

• CBS, which was once owned by William Paley, was bought by Larry Tisch and Lowes Hotel and is now owned by Viacom

State of the Media

• Larry Grossman was the Vice President of News at NBC

• Dan Rather at CBS

The Key to Positive Media Relations

• You must be PROACTIVE!

• You must make it happen
Training the Media

- Make an appointment to meet the news director, assignment editor, and any reporters who may cover your organization

Techniques

- Get to know the reporter who covers your organization
- Take them out to lunch

Techniques

- How to avoid being quoted out of context
- Live interviews

Techniques

- Handling Media Interviews
- Know who you are talking with
- Know the questions in advance

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- Soundbites in the 1960 Presidential Campaign averaged 40+ seconds
Techniques

• Handling Media Interviews
• Know who you are talking with
• Know the questions in advance
• Soundbites in the 1960 Presidential Campaign averaged 40+ seconds
• Today…less than 10 seconds

Techniques

• Conducting a press conference…
• Practice before the event

• If it works for the President of the United States…it can work for you!

Crisis Management

• Voluntarily admit mistakes have been made
• Explain why the mistakes were made
• Say and show contrition and sincere concern
• Agree to take steps necessary to correct the problem
• Commit to never letting it happen again

Crisis Press Conference

• Make sure you control the press conference (do not let it control you!)
• Make opening statement
• Say you will take a few questions
• Acknowledge reporters from left to right
• Say you have time for one more question
• Leave without looking back

Media Relations

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Keys to Dealing with the Media

Why talk to the media?
- Gain recognition for your work
- Helps to positively shape public opinion towards the university
- Keeps people informed about aspirations and accomplishments

Preparation
- Do your homework—know the facts
- Know the two or three points you wish to make. Are they honest, meaningful and to the point?
- Make sure you know with whom you are speaking and his/her organization and the format (of the show)
- Ask questions before agreeing to the interview such as the interview’s purpose, the angle of the story, other sources being interviewed

Preparation
- Don’t be ambushed. If you need time to prepare, set the interview for an agreed upon time
- Have your facts in order and test yourself with difficult questions
- Know what’s in the news to avoid embarrassing lack of knowledge

How to talk to: TV reporters
- Be brief, don’t ramble…think sound bites. Stories may only get a 10-30 second cut. Boil your message down to 12-24 quotable words
- Avoid distracting movements
- Maintain eye contact with the reporter, not the camera
- Be professional—audience impressions will be based more on your voice, face, attire, personal charm and credibility

How to talk to: TV reporters
- Don’t forget the tape is rolling and the microphone is on!
- Know the format and theme of the show
- Use pitch and rate changes in your voice for variety
Appearance for TV interviews

- Don’t slouch, rock back and forth, swivel, twitch, or twiddle
- Make sure face and hand gestures are appropriate to your words
- Wear over-the-calf socks in case you cross your legs at the knee
- Keep jewelry simple
- Women should be wear their usual amount of makeup

How to talk to: Radio interviewers

- Be brief…think sound bites, don’t ramble. Stories may only get a 10-30 second cut. Boil your message down to 12-24 quotable words
- Find out how much time you are allowed
- Keep your mike distance during the program (based on sound level readings)

How to talk to: Newspaper reporters

- Use short, snappy quotes
- Boil your message down to 12-24 quotable words
- Offer a visually appealing photo opportunity—never have a picture taken while you’re behind your desk
How to talk to:
Newspaper reporters
♦ Give copies of charts, graphs, and reports at the end of the interview if you show them to the reporter
♦ Use conversational language
♦ Use clear examples to illustrate points

The Interview
♦ Have two to three points for your message…avoid too many points. Positive messages can come out of negative events. If you’re fixing a problem, that’s a positive message
♦ Never speak “off the record”
♦ Use everyday words and offer your examples
♦ Avoid using too many statistics
♦ Be patient and help the reporter clarify facts and issues that might seem clear to you

The interview
♦ If you don’t know the answer, don’t pretend that you do…volunteer to research the question and promptly call the reporter back before deadline
♦ You do not have to answer a hypothetical question

The interview
♦ Use voice inflection, a hand gesture, eye contact, body language or key phrases like “What is really critical to know is…” to underscore your message, especially for TV and radio
♦ Repeat your message several times
♦ Be definite about your answers

The interview
♦ State your most important information first, then fill in the details
♦ If asked a question that you can’t talk about, explain why and redirect. “Bridge” from the question to your message when possible

The Problem Interview
♦ Seek advice beforehand on what can be said
♦ Remember to never speak “off the record”
♦ Avoid saying “no comment”—just give a reason why you can’t answer
♦ When responding to a negative question, don’t repeat the negative—answer with a positive.
♦ Be patient, even if the reporter is aggressive
The Problem Interview

♦ Stay within your area of expertise and responsibility
♦ Don’t make speculative statements that might backfire
♦ Avoiding a tough interview will not kill the story, but it will kill your chance to promote your message
♦ It’s alright to admit a problem, but make sure to state the steps being taken to fix it

Wrap-up of Do’s and Don’ts

Do:

♦ Conduct the interview with PR staff present; establish ground rules
♦ Promptly return a reporter’s call—they have daily deadlines
♦ Make sure someone handles the call if you are unavailable
♦ Ask the reporter to identify you with Regent University

Wrap-up of Do’s and Don’ts

Do:

♦ Correct the record if you are asked a question based on false data
♦ Answer honestly and avoid jargon
♦ Transition to your key messages when possible
♦ Remember that reporters represent the public
♦ Relate answers to readers/viewers

Wrap-up of Do’s and Don’ts

Don’t:

♦ Fail to prepare
♦ Cover or gloss over the truth
♦ Speculate
♦ Let the reporter put words in your mouth
♦ Ask to see the story before it goes to print or on air…you can offer to check specific facts

Wrap-up of Do’s and Don’ts

Don’t:

♦ Argue with the interviewer, but instead, “step up” to a situation…don’t be passive
♦ Forget to listen
♦ Assume the reporter knows nothing about the issue
♦ Overreact if you’re misquoted and the error is minor
Dealing with the Media

Please give us your feedback.